

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY KIGALI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6312

INFO AMEMBASSY BUMUMBURA

AMCONSUL BUKAVU

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

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E. O. 11652 N/A

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1. HEALTH MINISTERS MAJOR JEAN BANDUSHA OF BURUNDI, TSHIBANGU MALEMBE TANGA OF ZAIRE AND ILDEPHONSE MUSAFILI OF RWANDA MET IN KIGALI JUNE 22-23 TO DISCUSS THE CHOLERA THREAT IN THE REGION. AT A JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE THEY DISCUSSED THE PRESENT STATUS OF THE EPIDEMIC AND THEIR PLANS TO OVERCOME IT. MUSAFILI OF RWANDA EXPLAINED BACKGROUND OF APPEARANCE OF CHOLERA IN TANZANIA LAST NOVEMBER AND ITS SPREAD AFTER SOME MONTHS TO RUMONGE IN BURUNDI AND UVIRA AND KALEMIE IN ZAIRE'S KIVU REGION. MUSAFILI CATEGORICALLY DENIED THAT CHOLERA HAD REACHED RWANDA. ONE CASE FROM UVIRA HAD BEEN BROUGHT TO RWANDA BUT THE PATIENT WAS ISOLATED AND TREATED WITH NO FURTHER SPREAD. OTHER PEOPLE THOUGHT THEMSELVES AFFLICTED BUT IN REALITY THEY HAD ORDINARY DIARRHEA. MUSAFILI CAUTIONED AGAINST UNJUSTIFIED PANIC. HE SAID RWANDA COULD NOT HOPE TO VACCINATE ITS ENTIRE POPULATION, UNCLASSIFIED

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AND THAT ANYWAY THE VACCINE IS NOT VERY EFFECTIVE -- IT IS RECOMMENDED ONLY FOR THOSE NEEDING IT FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL. BUT, HE SAID, CHOLERA IS A DISEASE LIKE OTHERS, AMENABLE TO TREATMENT, AND RWANDA HAS MEDICINE FOR TREATMENT AND IS GETTING MORE FROM FRIENDLY COUNTRIES.

2. THE ZAIRE MINISTER SAID CHOLERA APPEARED IN ZAIRE LAST FEBRUARY AND ALL APPROPRIATE STEPS WERE TAKEN TO OVERCOME IT AT UVIRA AND KALEMIE. BUT HE ADDED THAT WITH THE PROBLEMS OF SHABA THE MINISTRY WAS HARD-PRESSED TO MEET ALL DEMANDS UPON IT: "WE ARE REALLY OBLIGED TO BATTLE ON ALL FRONTS."

3. AS FOR BURUNDI, MINISTER BANDUSHA SAID HIS GOVERNMENT TOOK TIMELY STEPS BOTH TO EDUCATE THE POPULATION ON MEANS OF SELF-PROTECTION THROUGH BETTER HYGIENE AND PRE-PLACEMENT OF RESOURCES FOR TREATMENT WHEN CASES APPEARED ALONG THE BORDER WITH TANZANIA. THESE MEASURES WERE TAKEN AS EARLY AS MAY 11 CQTI THE FIRST CASES APPEARED AT RUMONGE ON MAY 25. FOR ALL BURUNDI THERE HAVE BEEN 172 CURES, 11 DEATHS AND 31 HOSPITALIZED IN THE FOUR TREATMENT CENTERS, ACCORDING TO BANDUSHA.

4. THE SAME ISSUE OF LOCAL NEWS SHEET HAS ARTICLE ATTRIBUTED TO TANZANIAN PRESS AGENCY, SAYING THAT TANZANIA, BURUNDI, ZAIRE AND ZAMBIA ARE MEETING JUNE 27-28 AT MPANGA, TANZANIA, TO LOOK INTO MEANS OF COMBATTING CHOLERA "LATENT" IN THESE REGIONS.

5. COMMENT: MUSAFILI'S PUBLIC STATEMENTS OF ASSURANCE ARE NOT ALTOGETHER CONSISTENT WITH COMMENTS FROM OTHER KNOWLEDGEABLE SOURCES WHO SAY RWANDA REMAINS WOEFULLY SHORT OF MEDICINE WITH WHICH TO TREAT CHOLERA PATIENTS.
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LARGE SHIPMENTS OF VACCINE AND ANTIBIOTICS HAVE REPORTEDLY ARRIVED, BUT THERE IS STILL A MAJOR DISTRIBUTION PROBLEM IN THE EVENT OF EMERGENCY.
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